UNITED NATIONS

Daily Highlights

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THURSDAY HIGHLIGHTS

* Secretary-General, in message to mark International Women's Day, notes significant gains of last 20 years but says no society treats its women as well as its men.

* Bosnian Federation police move into Sarajevo suburb of Hadzici; find 50 mostly elderly Serbs remain out of population of 9,000.

* More than 17,000 UNITA troops now quartered in Angola; parties agree quartering and formation of unified Angolan armed forces will be completed by June.

* Special Committee on Charter concludes session with recommendations on aid to third States affected by United Nations Sanctions.

* New round of United Nations-sponsored Guatemala peace talks to begin 27 March in Mexico City.

* Rwandan Government accepts Secretary-General's proposal to maintain the Office of the Special Representative in Kigali for six months.

* Comprehensive Plan of Action to resolve exodus of people from Viet Nam and Laos to formally end on June 30.

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The status of women had improved markedly in the half-century of the existence of the United Nations and there had been significant progress in the past twenty years, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. However, no society treated its women as well as its men and progress had not been uniform, he said in a message to mark International Women's Day, read by his Special Adviser, Under-Secretary-General Rosario Green. Poverty and inadequate health care had a particular impact on the lives of women and their children. The majority of the more than 1.3 billion people struggling to survive on less than a single dollar a day were women.

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(more)

The Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing last September, declared that the empowerment of women living in poverty was central to all sustainable development efforts, he continued. Thousands of women who attended the Conference were taking the results to their communities. They were developing strategies and working to translate the global consensus into concrete action at the grass-roots level. The fresh surge of energy must be sustained and supported at all levels of the international community. It was critical for women's advancement that decisions made at major UN international conferences during the last five years were implemented. The conferences had defined an agenda for action in which women would be a positive force for change and progress for themselves and society.

There was a concrete strategy in the Organization to promote true gender balance in the international civil service, and he was holding managers accountable, the Secretary-General said. He had introduced an item on "the status of women in the secretariats of the United Nations system" in the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC). There must be vigilance particularly during the UN's financial crisis that the resolve to pursue strategies and plans are not weakened and women are not affected disproportionately, he added.

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Bosnian Federation police entered Hadzici today, the third of five Serb-controlled suburbs in Sarajevo which will come under Government authority and found only 50 mostly elderly Serb residents out of a total of 9,000. An estimated 60,000 Serbs have evacuated the capital in the last 25 days. Gangs of thugs have been telling residents to leave the suburb and burning houses and schools. The Federation police were accompanied by 53 United Nations civilian police monitors.

A number of officers sent to join the United Nations International Police Task Forces (IPTF) in Bosnia and Herzegovina had to be sent home after failing language or driving tests, the spokesman said. To date, 43 civilian police from 12 countries had to be repatriated, because they did not have the skills to drive on icy mountain roads or speak English adequately. The United Nations would implement a pre-screening process to help Governments test police, she added.

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In Angola, over 17,000 troops from the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA) have been quartered in four sites, a spokesman for the Organization said today. The United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM) hopes to open four additional sites by next week to accommodate about 20,000 more troops.

At a recent meeting in Libreville, Gabon, Angolan President Eduardo dos Santos and UNITA leader Joseph Savimbi agreed that the quartering of UNITA troops and the formation of a unified Angolan armed forces would be completed by June, the spokesman said.

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The Special Committee on the Charter of the United Nations has sent a report to the General Assembly containing recommendations on assistance to third States affected by UN sanctions. The Assembly was asked to consider an appropriate organizational framework to address implementation of Charter provisions on helping third States affected by sanctions imposed under Chapter VII. The Committee is mandated to examine issues relating to the maintenance of international peace and security, the peaceful settlement of disputes and the strengthening of the role of the organization. It concluded a two-week session yesterday.

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The United Nations will convene a new round of talks between the Government of Guatemala and the Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (URNG) to be held from 27 to 29 March in Mexico City, a UN spokesman said today. The talks will focus on social and economic aspects of agrarian conditions in the country.

The Secretary-General was encouraged by the positive outcome of the last round of talks between the parties and the rapprochement achieved at a recent meeting between Guatemalan President Alvaro Arzu and the URNG leadership. He hopes significant progress towards concluding an agreement will be made at the upcoming round of talks, the spokesman added.

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The Rwandan Government has accepted the proposal made by the Secretary-General to maintain the Office of the Special Representative in Kigali for a period of six months. The decision was contained in letters received from the Foreign Minster of Rwanda and the Permanent Representative of Rwanda to the United Nations, according to a UN Spokesman.

The retention of the Office was one of the options put forward by the Secretary-General who said this office would work to strengthen the judicial system, facilitate the return of refugees and rehabilitate the national infrastructure.

Meanwhile, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), reports from Kigali that during the month of February, over 23,000 refugees returned to Rwanda from Burundi, Zaire, Tanzania and Uganda.

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The Comprehensive Plan of Action to resolve the exodus of people from Viet Nam and the Lao People's Democratic Republic would formally come to an end on June 30, according to an announcement in Geneva. The Steering Committee of the International Conference on Indo-Chinese Refugees, which adopted the Plan seven years ago, declared that the Plan has successfully met its objectives and that clandestine departures from the countries of origin have essentially come to an end.

The decision to end the Plan of Action means that the UN High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), will phase out care and maintenance activities in South-East Asian camps for rejected asylum seekers as of 1 July. However, in Hong Kong, which shelters a large number of rejected asylum seekers, UNHCR will maintain alternative arrangements.

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F R I D A Y H I G H L I G H T S

* Security Council asks Secretary-General to maintain United Nations office in the country headed by his Special Representative.

* Rapid conclusion of talks on all outstanding military matters is critical for advancement of peace process in Angola, Secretary-General says.

* In former Yugoslavia, there are more reports of Bosnian Serbs abandoning their homes.

* Secretary-General says issue of Taiwan is an internal one.

* General Assembly President ends official visit to China and Japan.

* ICAO to initiate investigation on shooting down of US-registered private civil aircraft by Cuban warplanes.

* Outbreak of cerebrospinal meningitis in the northern Nigeria causes over 1,000 deaths, WHO says.

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The Security Council this afternoon took note of the Secretary-General's arrangements for the withdrawal of the United Nations Assistance Mission for Rwanda (UNAMIR). Unanimously adopting Resolution 1050 (1996) the Council encouraged the Secretary-General to maintain a United Nations office in the country headed by his Special Representative. The office would include the present UN communications system and radio station and its purposes would be to support the efforts of Rwanda to promote national reconciliation, strengthen the judicial system, facilitate the return of refugees and rehabilitate the country's infrastructure, and to coordinate the efforts of the United Nations to that end.

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The withdrawal of the Mission is to start tomorrow, 9 March in accordance with the arrangements agreed to by the Council in resolution 1029 (1995) of 12 December 1995. That resolution required that UNAMIR be withdrawn within six weeks of the end of the mandate. The last military elements are expected to depart by mid-April when all installations will be turned over to other UN agencies or to the Government of Rwanda. Staff officers will leave shortly thereafter.

The Council paid tribute to the work of UNAMIR and to the personnel who served in it and stressed the continued importance of the voluntary and safe repatriation of Rwandan refugees and of genuine national reconciliation. The Council also called upon States and organizations to continue to provide assistance for the reconstruction of Rwanda and the rehabilitation of the infrastructure of the country, including the Rwandan justice system.

UNAMIR was established by the Security Council on 5 October 1993 by resolution 872 (1993). The Mission's initial 6-month mandate was to assist in the implementation of the peace agreement signed by the then Government of Rwanda and the Rwandese Patriotic Front (RPF) in Arusha, United Republic of Tanzania, in August 1993.

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A rapid conclusion of the talks on all outstanding military matters is critical for the advancement of the peace process in Angola, according to Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali. In a report on the United Nations Angola Verification Mission (UNAVEM III), the Secretary-General said the Government of Angola must intensify practical preparations for the integration of personnel from the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA), into the Angolan Armed Forces and administrative and governmental structures. He said confidence between the parties must be reinforced by the release of all prisoners held by UNITA, unrestricted circulation of people throughout Angola, the launching of a country-wide campaign to disarm civilians, the transformation of UNITA into a political party and the effective implementation of other aspects of the Lusaka Protocol.

The Secretary-General welcomed the recent meetings between President Eduardo dos Santos and UNITA leader Dr. Jonas Savimbi, noting that these high-level meetings can play an important role in the promotion of national reconciliation and encourage the steady advance of the peace process. While he commended the Government for

the implementation of several of its commitments and UNITA's quartering of more than 16,000 troops, the Secretary-General however warned, that time is running short if the parties are to complete numerous outstanding tasks foreseen in the Lusaka Protocol.

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In the former Yugoslavia, there are more reports of Bosnian Serbs abandoning their homes. A UN spokesman says Ilidza will be transferred to Federation control next week and field workers are reporting that a large number of ethnic Serbs are fleeing the area. She said that the rate of property destruction had increased quite a bit. Estimates are that since 15 December, 53,000 out of an estimated population in Serb-controlled Sarajevo of about 70,000 had left.

The International Police Task Force (IPTF) civilian police monitors have so far registered 1,400 people in Ilidza, who would stay after the transfer of authority. The spokesman quoted field workers as saying there was a general upsurge in crime particularly in Vogosca, Ilyjas and Razlovac and they attributed that to youths from Sarajevo entering the new transition area.

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Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali says the issue of Taiwan is an internal one. The view was expressed in a statement issued through a spokesman in answer to queries from UN correspondents over military exercises being conducted by China.

The Secretary-General hoped that all concerned would exercise restraint so as not to interfere with the rights of other States under international law and to avoid tensions in the area. The issue of Taiwan was of course an internal one on which the General Assembly had ruled unequivocally in its 26 session. The Secretary-General noted China's firm and long-standing position that this issue would be resolved solely by peaceful means.

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General Assembly President Professor Diogo Freitas do Amaral has concluded a four-day official visit to China and Japan. In China, the Assembly President's discussions focussed on the process of reform of

the United Nations, bearing in mind the important role that falls on China in this connection, by virtue of its permanent membership in the Security Council and its closeness to the concerns of developing countries which comprise a majority of the Organization's membership. The Chinese authorities set out in detail their thinking on reform of the Assembly and of the Security Council.

In Japan, Professor Freitas do Amaral held discussions with Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto and other senior government officials. They discussed various aspects of the process of reform of the United Nations, including the financial aspects, enlargement of the Security Council and restructuring the Economic and Social area.

The Assembly President said that the reform process, which involved the broad membership of the Organization, could now enter a more intensive and concrete phase of discussion with the tabling in recent weeks of three specific proposals, by the European Union, the United States and Japan.

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Responding to requests from the Government of the United States of America, the Government of Cuba and the United Nations Security Council, the Council of the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) considered the incident in which two United States-registered private civil aircraft were destroyed on 24 February 1996 by Cuban military aircraft.

Meeting yesterday, at its Headquarters at Montreal, the Council in a resolution, directed the ICAO Secretary-General to immediately initiate an investigation of the incident in its entirety. The report of the investigation is to be submitted to the ICAO Council within 60 days. It will then be forwarded to the United Nations Security Council.

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The outbreak of cerebrospinal meningitis in the northern part of Nigeria, has caused 1,181 deaths out of the 8,423 cases reported as of the end of February, according to data received by the World Health Organization (WHO).

Experts from the WHO, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Medecins sans Frontieres have joined teams sent by the

Nigerian Ministry of Health to the affected areas in support of control activities. Samples are being investigated in laboratories in Nigeria and Norway.

The WHO Representative in Nigeria has commended the efforts made by the Federal Ministry of Health for its handling of the outbreak. Seven million doses of vaccines have been distributed to the affected areas. However, the WHO feels that an additional 10 million doses will be needed in the foreseeable future in order to ensure coverage of children under the age of 15, the population group at highest risk.

WHO experts have noted the shortage of drugs, particularly chloramphenicol, the most suitable drug to treat meningitis patients. The Nigerian Government has asked the WHO to help procure 50,000 vials of oily chloramphenicol, which is more convenient for use by health workers than the powder form, as well as 50,000 syringes and needles. The WHO is working closely in the field with local health authorities, UNICEF and Medecins sans Frontieres. The WHO has recommended that a task force/coordination committee be formed to improve information and intensify public education.

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